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November 20, 2000

The Honorable Neil Abercrombie  
 1502 Longworth House Office Building  
 U.S. House of Representatives  
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Abercrombie:

As peace negotiations have been overtaken by violence and suffering in the Palestinian territories, Congress has received many reports blaming the deteriorating situation on the Palestinian leadership. Legislation has been proposed to support Israel and punish the Palestinians. Because much of the information Congress receives is inaccurate or biased, Congress is acting in a manner that is not consistent with the U.S. role as an honest broker, not in the long-term national interest, and not representative of American traditions or values. I write to you in order to provide a more even-handed understanding of the current situation.

The reason for the tragic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is straightforward: For thirty-three years, Israel has done all in its substantial power to deny the Palestinian people their right to national sovereignty, political independence, dignity, economic and social development, and personal liberty. The protests of the Palestinian people are nothing other than an expression of extreme frustration at the fact that, despite seven years of negotiation, they do not see a light at the end of the tunnel because Israel continues to control nearly all aspects of Palestinian life.

Palestinians accepted the Oslo Accords because we believed this would lead to our long-sought freedom and independence. But seven years after Oslo, and more than a year after a Final Status Agreement was to have been concluded, Palestinians now believe that Israel has a far different interpretation of what the Oslo agreement is about. Instead of ending military occupation, Israel has built more settlements and confiscated more Palestinian lands. To many Palestinians it appears that Israel is merely using the Oslo process to legitimize and legalize its continued domination of the West Bank and Gaza - in effect, to make permanent Israeli apartheid in the Occupied Territories. The grinding and dehumanizing effects of thirty-three years of military occupation, coupled with increasing confiscations of Palestinian land which is then used to house extremist Jewish settlers in our midst, is simply too much for any people to bear.

"The new Intifada, which displays the characteristics of both a popular uprising and a quasi-military one, is a final attempt to thrust a mirror in the face of Israelis and to tell them: 'Take a good look at yourselves and see how racist you have become.'"

Palestinians want a permanent peace that is based on justice. We want a peace with which our children and Israeli children can live. We want a peace between equals, not an imposed peace by the "victors" over the "vanquished."

In order for peace to prevail, Israel must acknowledge that the control and domination of one people by another is an anachronism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Israelis need to end the mentality of the occupier; accept the compromises that creating a truly viable Palestine will require; and make the strategic choice to live as a neighbor, not as an oppressor.

The United States plays a central role in progressing toward this goal. America is Israel's best friend and largest financial supporter. No other nation is better able to convince Israel of the need to alter its mentality of domination and end its occupation of Palestinians. But the U.S. can play this unique role only if American officials, including the United States Congress, take a sincerely objective approach, and are driven by the pursuit of justice, not by the blind endorsement of Israeli policy. Legislation that holds only Palestinians responsible for honoring agreements and places sole blame on them for violence does not help the quest for peace. Such legislation tacitly excuses Israel's racial discrimination and military aggression, and will only encourage Israel to continue its current behavior. In addition, obviously biased legislation will further convince Palestinians that no hope exists for a peaceful solution to our quest for our national rights because our "honest broker" is not "honest."

As Congress considers future legislation relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I respectfully request that you keep the facts of Israeli occupation in mind. I urge you to structure any future legislation so that it will equally require both Israelis and Palestinians to honor our commitments to refrain from violence, to implement the terms of the Oslo Accords and interim agreements, and to move toward living as neighbors instead of as occupier and captive.

Sincerely,

Hassan A. Rahman  
Chief Representative of the PLO and PNA